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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

THE FUNCTION AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

I

MODERN philosophy in its regnant aspect is, for all its pride of universality, an exceedingly one-sided affair. It is essentially the outcome of the remarkable nineteenth-century development of the mathematical, physical, and biological sciences. Its "philosophical" function has consisted in subjecting the concepts employed by these sciences to an inspection more penetrating than could be given by the workers in the special fields. Thus where the physicist swiftly marshaled atoms and electrons, energies and matters, spaces and motions without critical thought of their wider implications, the philosopher, free of the stress of immediate experimental necessity, examined these concepts for the more far-reaching meaning which they held. For several generations now philosophy has concerned itself almost wholly with such concepts as cause, action, matter, mind, truth, mechanism, organism, number, class, infinity, objective, subjective. One need not doubt the true philosophical character of such concern; yet one may not escape the conviction that in restricting itself to these interests philosophy has fallen short of its adequate task. Indeed, among philosophers themselves there has been manifest of late the feeling that philosophy has lost much of its proper reach and power, that it has relinquished in somewhat woeful manner its ancient prerogative of "spectator of all time and all existence."

Yet it would be unfair to blame philosophy or philosophers for this restriction of the scope of inquiry. Philosophy, like every other human enterprise, is, in main degree, the product of its time. Nay, more, if it is to be true to its scientific spirit, if it is to make no proud effort to build itself out of its own imaginings, but is to hold itself to the task of faithful, searching criticism of the dominant concepts of its day, philosophy may never depart very far from the spirit and interest of its particular age. Contemporary philosophy, in short, has, without blame to itself, been one-sided because the scientific age just closing was itself one-sided. The natural and the mathematical

sciences were all-important. The social sciences were scarcely in evidence.

The present, however, already wears a different aspect. Science to-day shows widely and powerfully the effect of a generation and more of intense and growing social concern. The change to a new type of economy, the vast and intricate expansion of industrial and business methods, the growth of new types of congregate life, the application of the telegraph and the telephone, the development of newspapers, the linking of cities and nations by steamship and rail, the swift readjustments of economic wealth, the marshaling of men into new tasks and new relations,—all these have brought problems stimulating in their immensity. The result has been a new and wholly unprecedented grappling of thought with social issues. The science of economics, for example, possesses a magnitude and intricacy such as it has never had before. Sociology is wholly a child of our own day, still unformed, to be sure, and even yet scarce witting of its way, but vital with possibilities and quenchless with enthusiasm. Social biology, social psychology, social medicine, the science of charity, political science, jurisprudence, the psychology of religion, social ethics, social statistics, ethnology, ethnography, demography,—all of these, in the vigor of their promise, are really products of our own day.

It needs no prophet's eye, then, to see that for philosophy a new direction is imminent. As philosophy enters upon this new way, the same type of circumstances which gave it its task during the period of the mathematical-natural sciences will give it its task in the period of the social sciences. Each social science will employ its characteristic concepts. Philosophy must be the comprehensive critic of these.

To make this position clear let us take an example from economics. To most persons economics is the science which holds the more or less decisive word as to the organization of the processes of production and distribution. It is assumed that economics knows, or aims to know, the conditions under which things ought to be produced and the manner in which such products ought to be distributed. This assumption has given to the science of economics a commanding position in our social and business life, a position indicated by the fact that if a theory of social reform is condemned by the greater body of economists, there is in this very fact, for most scientific-minded persons, reason for its rejection. Such power of social authority, however, may not be lightly granted any science save upon the assurance that its concepts and methods are adequate to its commanding pretensions. Economics, therefore, invites inspection as to its fundamental point of view and procedure.

Let us examine a recent definition of economics.¹ "Economics, or

¹ Seager, H. R., "Principles of Economics," page 1.

political economy, is the social science which treats of that portion of human activity which is concerned with earning a living." An ambiguity at once discloses itself. Does "earning a living" mean earning a reputable living, a living worth while to the individual and to society; or does it mean earning any kind of living, performing any kind of work or service that keeps one alive? Evidently, if it means the former, economics must be a fundamentally evaluating science, determining what ways of life are "good" ways and what are "bad." It must, in short, make use of ethical categories and conclusions. The writer continues: "It deals, on the one hand, with man's wants and, on the other, with the goods (*i. e.*, the commodities and services) upon which the gratification of his wants depends." Again an ambiguity discloses itself,—two, in fact. Does "goods" mean "good things," things *good* for a man, or has the word the neutral meaning which it assumes in such a word as "dry-goods"? Again, in dealing with man's "wants," is economics dealing with his fundamental wants, *i. e.*, his needs, or with anything he wants, irrespective of whether it is worth his while or "good" for him to want these things? Obviously, if the science of economics holds to the former of these two pairs of meanings—goods in the neutral sense and wants meaning any desires whatever—it can not serve as a sure guide for determining how and what we *ought* to produce and how and what wants ought to be satisfied.

The issue, therefore, is crucial. Either economics is a non-evaluating science, in which case it should not hold the peculiarly commanding position of social guidance which apparently it does; or it is an evaluating science, in which case any avowed separation on its part from the ethical sciences is wholly without point or justification. The writer above quoted is not long in taking his stand on this issue. On a succeeding page of his book (p. 52) he writes: "The material commodities and personal services which are objects of human desire are conveniently designated as *goods*, while the capacity or quality in goods which makes them desirable is called *utility*. As used in economics these terms are stripped of the moral implications that sometimes attach to them in ordinary speech. Thus, *anything that is an object of desire has utility and is a good*,² whether it be the hymn-book of the missionary or the whiskey of the trader. This usage is designed to give greater precision to discussions involving these concepts and also to avoid the mistake of substituting the approval or condemnation of the actions of business men for the explanation of their action—the primary task of economics."

Economics, in short, if this writer is correct, *has nothing whatever to do* with the question what *ought* to be the organization of our

² Italics mine.

processes of production, distribution, and consumption. *It is a science wholly descriptive (explanatory) of actual processes.* If this is true, then obviously the economist goes outside his province when, without a modification of his own purely descriptive attitude, he criticizes the social ethicist. The latter points to what he believes to be a more adequate type of business organization. Upon the question of value here involved the economist and the social ethicist have no secure meeting-ground. For the one, everything that satisfies a desire has utility, is a "good"; for the other, only those things or services that satisfy desires which ought to be satisfied have utility, are "goods"; all others are disutilities, "bads." The difference in point of view is crucial. What makes for a perfectly successful economic organization under the one meaning may, under the other, make for fundamental individual and social failure.³

I take this as a typical illustration of the situation with which the social philosopher is confronted. Obviously, in the cases cited, the concepts "earning a living," "goods," "utility" are used in a carefully restricted sense (or broad sense, as the reader may view it) which makes them unavailable for precise human valuation. Economics, as we have remarked, seems, however, to have served as an evaluating authority, and this not only to the laymen who read, but to many of the experts who write the conclusions. Hence the need for a broader and more critical inspection of the point of view and function of this science. What, for example, does the science mean by such a fundamental concept as "wealth"? Does wealth mean

³ Cf. Nicholson, "Principles of Political Economy," page 14: "In my opinion one of the greatest merits of the old English school is the sharp distinction drawn between economic laws and moral ideals. Political economy on this view classifies and explains certain social facts, and discovers their laws and relations, just as the natural sciences deal with phenomena of a different order. Thus, starting with private property and freedom of competition as existing facts, we may discover certain laws of rent, profits, and wages; but whether this distribution of the nation's wealth is morally just or unjust is relegated, together with the question wherein justice consists, to ethics." Cf., too, the different point of view of Cunningham, in "Politics and Economics," page 12: "Economic science is wholly practical, it has no *raison d'être* except as directing conduct towards a given end: it studies the means leading towards that end not merely for the sake of knowledge, but in the hope of guiding men so that they may pursue that end in the most appropriate way: it is not content to describe the principles that have actuated human conduct, but desires to look at these principles in the light of after events, and thus to put forward the means that are best adapted for attaining the end in view." Cf., too, the ambiguous statement of Hewins, in "Encyclopedia Britannica," 11th ed., art. *Economics*: "Economics . . . includes the discussion of all the numerous factors which make life profitable, whether to the nation or to the business, or to the individual man. It may be conceived either as an historical science (What principles have in fact paid?), or as an abstract science (What are the true principles which must pay, presupposing an ideal?)."

wealth, or does it mean simply the sum of "goods," as above described?⁴ Has wealth reference simply to the quantity of goods produced, or also to the manner of their distribution? Has it, more broadly and deeply, reference also to the manner of their consumption? What are business "efficiency," industrial "efficiency"? Has the first reference to the power to accumulate surplus, the second to the power to produce goods? Or have both a broader meaning? What is meant by a "living" wage, by industrial "health," industrial "progress," industrial "stimulus"? What is "good business"? What, in deeper fact, is "saving"? What are the real "costs" of business and industry?

Here is a wealth of concepts which needs critical inspection. It is not unfair to say that even by economists they are still used with vague and shifting meanings. The case is analogous to the unprecise use of such terms as matter, energy, cause, etc., by the physical scientists. Social philosophy, therefore, in relation to economics has its task clearly defined: it is to examine, first, the intended scope of the concepts employed; second, it is to determine whether or not in the actual elaboration of these concepts the science passes imperceptibly beyond the intended use; and, third, it is to determine what relation the special meanings assigned bear to the meanings which these concepts yield when they are regarded from a point of view that is thoroughly comprehensive.

The third is, of course, the peculiarly distinctive task of social philosophy. The aim of the social philosopher is to get a *whole* view of social life. Economics at its best can not yield such a whole view; nor can political science, nor jurisprudence, nor social psychology, nor social medicine. Each of these is obviously and avowedly restricted in outlook. Each in a sense is disorganic. Political science, for example, treats of government; but its interest is in only one type of government, the kind that operates through votes and legislatures, judges and executives. Its conception of citizenship is then framed in view of this restricted interest, so that citizenship comes to mean, in this science, a certain relation which persons bear to votes and legislatures, judges and executives. But, as a matter of fact, social government passes widely beyond these. The biologist in his laboratory, the chemist at his retorts, the research physician, the practising physician, the teacher of social or physical or mathematical truth, the director of newspaper policies, the organizer of business, the controller of credit, the bearer and rearer of children,—all these

⁴ Cf. Marshall, "Economics of Industry," pages 51-53: "All wealth consists of things that satisfy wants, directly or indirectly. . . . It includes all those things, external to a man which (i) belong to him, and do not equally belong to his neighbors, and therefore are distinctly his; and (ii) which are directly capable of a money measure."

are social governors. Government, in short, exists wherever there is power to organize and direct life destinies. Preeminently the *truth finders* and the *truth applicers* are the *government*. But if this is so, citizenship takes on a far wider meaning, being related now not simply to the secondary functions of voting and legislating, but to the primary functions of truth discovery and application.

Yet it would be folly to ask of political science that it take this broader view of government and citizenship. Its special task is to study *political* government, a task which is a wholly possible and valuable one. Mischief arises only when, by the reader of political science, or sometimes by the scientist himself, the special task is not recognized as special; when government and citizenship, for example, are supposed to have their final and most comprehensive meaning discovered by this avowedly restricted science. That the mischief is not imaginary is shown by the misconceptions that are rife in the contemporary discussion whether women shall participate in the government of society. When the essence of government is held to reside in purely political acts and relations, the granting of a vote means a momentous change from non-participation to participation in social government. When, however, more broadly, it is held to reside in all those activities that organize and direct life activities, the granting of a vote is seen but to complete and clarify a participation long since a fact. Again, the mischief discloses itself in the teaching of so-called "civics" to our children. "Civics," as taught, consists very largely in an analysis of the structure and functions of *political* government. Good citizenship, therefore, comes preeminently to mean good voting. Thus a serious divorce is made between civic life on the one hand and business or scientific or literary or domestic life on the other.

The task of the social philosopher, in all these matters, is to find the broader, the organic view. The same situation is exemplified in law. It is a notorious fact, particularly in America, that something very mysterious and distressing has happened to the concept of justice. Our high judicial experts are men of probity and sincerity; our law is a carefully elaborated system reaching far back into human history; our procedure is conducted with intricate and painstaking attention; and yet justice somehow makes but a sorry showing in the hands of our scientific legalists. The same typical difficulty confronts us here. Justice, from the legalist's point of view, is, very often, not justice at all. Why? Precisely because it is understood from the legalists' point of view. An analysis of the cases before our American courts would easily prove that the courts in large measure have suffered from the "special scientist's fallacy," the fallacy, namely, of accepting the interpretation of a concept given by

the special science as an interpretation thoroughly comprehensive and capable of unmodified application to the concrete human situation.

In this case, as in the others, a more organic view is necessary. Justice is an economic concept as well as a legal. It has its roots in biology and psychology, in sociology and ethics, in education and religion. It is, therefore, not to be defined by legalists, but by philosophers. Obviously, to borrow from Plato, until our judges are philosophers—philosophers of law, not merely legal scientists—there can be little hope of an interpretation and administration of justice that shall be largely and humanly social.

II

The cases adduced will be sufficient to make clear the function of social philosophy. Social philosophy is the critique of social categories. The question now arises how social philosophy is to proceed most systematically and effectively in the pursuit of its peculiar task. The social categories lie all about us in haphazard disarray. One of the relevant criticisms passed upon sociology is that, for all its assumption of scientific spirit and procedure, its results are in large measure unorganized. Its concepts hang loosely together. One passes from an analysis of the mob spirit to a discussion of the social psychology of leisure, and from an elaboration of charitable methods to an analysis of the class structure of society. In the case of sociology, however, the material is so vast and so heterogeneous, all kinds of problems crowd so upon the investigator, that there is little blame to the science if it has not yet set its house in order. Again, the social sciences themselves (whether we regard them as component parts of sociology or as coordinate with it) hang together but loosely. One of the sharp modern criticisms of history, for example, is that it has severed itself quite to its own hurt from economics. A like criticism is passed upon economics, that it has severed itself from social history and ethics; while jurisprudence is accused of holding a position of magnificent separation from all the sciences. One is reminded of the mutual backbitings of the natural scientists. The biologist was warned by the chemist that he must pay more heed to chemical truth; the chemist by the physicist that chemistry must be more alive to physics. All of which is indication to the philosopher—metaphysical or social—that the *organization* of concepts, which is his desideratum, does not lie ready to hand, but is one which he must himself effect.

The first task of social philosophy, then, is to make an inventory of the master concepts employed by the social sciences and to arrange these in some manner of organic relationship. Such a preliminary

organization will, of course, be but tentative, since it is impossible to foretell what changes will be wrought by the process of philosophic inspection and interpretation. But it will serve to give a working view of the field to be covered.

The social sciences deal with those relations and activities which are the outcome of the fundamental social powers of human life. It is not difficult to see that all of these powers have their root in appetite, positive and negative. Appetite in its positive aspect is a seeking-after, a being-drawn-to certain objects and situations. In its negative aspect, it is aversion, disgust, a seeking-to-escape certain objects and situations. Primarily, to be sure, appetites are individual in their reference; but human life is so constituted that appetites "lap over" from individual to individual and so constitute a true social nexus. This will be obvious when we name the two elemental forms of appetite: (1) the appetite for food and shelter, and (2) the appetite for sex. The food- and shelter-getting activities bring the individual very quickly into relation with other individuals; while the sexual activities are in their very essence social.

It is obvious that social science is, in the first place, and fundamentally, concerned with the two great types of relationship that are the outgrowth of these primary appetites; namely, work and sex-life. The latter, then, are the initial master concepts of the social sciences. Out of them develops a vast and complex system of derivative concepts. Work, for example, involves the concept of utility, which in turn bespeaks the concept of end or purpose. Again, it implies such various concepts as skill, productiveness, abundance, scarcity, application, industry, self-control, and, in more social reference, exchange, distribution, fairness, cooperation, competition, price, market, money, interest, rent, etc. In one direction the concept of work opens out into the science of economics; in another, into ethics; and again, in a third direction, into technology and art. In its more elaborated forms, as we shall later see, it develops into government and religion.

The concept of sex-life likewise opens out variously; on the one hand into the life relations made possible by sex, on the other hand into the different qualities of character developed through sex-life. Thus sex-life involves such concepts as promiscuity, marriage, polygamy, monogamy, blood-relationship, illegitimacy, divorce, etc., and again such concepts as chastity, lust, licentiousness, marital affection, parental care, etc. The concept asks toll of and makes its specific contribution to the sciences pertinent to social relations,—biology (heredity, sex hygiene, etc.), economics (family support, division of labor, etc.), psychology (adolescence, abnormality, etc.), sociology (laws of family, etc.), and ethics (purity, parental obligation, etc.). Here, too, as in the case of work, the concept opens out into art, government, and religion.

Almost as fundamental as the nutritive and sex appetites—perhaps as fundamental—is that peculiar appetite for colors, sounds, etc., which, in its developed form, we call the esthetic sense. Primarily a form of individual enjoyment, it manifests itself more and more widely and intricately in outer forms, and so becomes a power of large social significance. In one sense the esthetic power is independent; in another sense it is intimately related to the other powers of human life. In its independence, it develops its own laws and standards; in its relation to other human interests, it subjects itself to laws and standards more comprehensive. Thus a conflict tends always to disclose itself between the special claims of beauty and the more organic claims of life. Esthetic enjoyment (the third master concept) develops, too, its elaborate system of derivative concepts which lend themselves both to organization and to inspection as to their wider significance,—harmony, discord, order, symmetry, balance, proportion, composition, “softness,” “sweetness,” “vigor,” melody, etc.

To pass now to the fourth fundamental concept. Life in all its forms is orientative. “Adaptation” is, in increasing measure, discovery. In its developed form such discovery becomes systematized as knowledge. The processes of knowledge-seeking and knowledge-imparting become systematized as science and education. It is unnecessary to dilate upon the profound social importance of this fourth master concept, knowledge. It need simply be pointed out here that knowledge—both the seeking and the imparting—develops its system of concepts,—truth, error, science, faith, law, uniformity, chance, development, nurture, education, creation, vocation, culture, etc., which offer themselves in peculiar measure to critical inspection.

Neither work, nor sex-life, nor the life of esthetic enjoyment, nor knowledge-seeking and imparting, however, can proceed far in their development without some organization of the life relations other than instinctive. Thus the elaboration of the life of work and sex and beauty and knowledge involves the development of government. Hence the fifth master concept. This concept, like the others, yields its increasingly intricate body of subordinate concepts,—justice, law, politics, citizenship, rights, property, liberty, etc., which, on the one hand, develop into the specific sciences of politics and jurisprudence, and on the other hand call into service the mathematical and natural sciences and such allied social sciences as history, economics, sociology, ethics, etc.

There is still a sixth master concept not so easy to define, yet far-reaching in its social effects. In one sense it is nothing more than the concept of appetite itself; and yet it extends so far beyond appetite in its primitive form that it not only demands a recognition for itself as

an independent concept, but forms sciences and disciplines in its own behoof. Appetite is a seeking, a seeking to attain the yet unattained, to avoid what may be escaped. It has, therefore, in its very essence an element prophetic of ideality, of aspiration. In this sense the concept of appetite already is, in a sense, the concept of which we are now to speak.

Life is primarily an adaptation (and therefore an attending) to physical things. But as life develops, it learns increasingly to attend not only to physical things, but also to its own attitudes toward these things, to the quality of its own seeking, and avoidances. It learns, in short, to detect certain directions, principles, ends in the seekings and avoidances. As a result, after long growth in conscious life, it formulates its concept of a new object to be pursued, an immaterial, ideal object,—the good. Thus consciously it aspires; it looks to an ideal of life; and it develops sciences and disciplines in the service of the ideal. These sciences, however, from the outset are not independent sciences, but are avowedly directive of all the other sciences. They indicate to work, sex-life, esthetic enjoyment, knowledge, and government what, in principle, their ends should be, what fundamentally they are *for*. Thus the sixth master concept of social science is the fundamentally evaluative concept of the good, the concept primarily of ethics and religion.

Work, sex-life, esthetic enjoyment, knowledge, government, the good,—it is with these that the social sciences are essentially concerned. A social philosophy, then, properly begins as a philosophy of work, or, to adopt the more specific modern terminology, as a philosophy of economics. It is noteworthy that while philosophical speculations upon economic matters are taking place all about us, from socialist treatises and utopias to detailed discussions of the wider human bearing of trusts and tariffs and taxes, no systematic *philosophy of economics* has yet been attempted. One may safely predict, however, that just as the fermentation in religious thought brought forth its resultant philosophies of religion, so the widespread contemporary discussion of all aspects of the economic situation will bring forth its appropriate philosophies of economics. At any rate, social philosophy has as its primary task the elaboration of such a philosophy.⁵

Sex-life has not yet developed its specific science. Here, too, however, discussion is rife,—discussion, likewise, that is distinctly philosophical in its quality. A second task, then, of social philosophy will be the careful systematization of the now haphazard sex discussion and an organization of it into a philosophy of sex-life.

⁵ An important step in this direction has been taken by the English economist, Mr. J. A. Hobson, in his recently published book, "Work and Wealth: A Human Valuation" (Macmillan).

The esthetic sense has had its expression in all manner of concrete forms. It has had, too, its philosophies. But it awaits to-day a philosophy consonant with the deeper psychological and physical insights of the modern age. Hence the third task of social philosophy will be the development of a philosophy of esthetics.

In the field of knowledge-seeking (science), philosophy has been particularly active. It has made vigorous and careful inspection of such concepts as truth, law, cause, etc., and has, therefore, in various directions developed its philosophies of science. Social philosophy will press these largely metaphysical and logical inquiries into the service of social understanding. It will also, however, be interested in the other, the educational, aspect of knowledge. Thus the social philosophy of knowledge will at once be a social philosophy of science and of education.

Government has indeed long since had its philosophies. Here it will be the new aspects of government—political, juridical, and more widely social—that will of necessity demand a new philosophy of government. And in this case, too, the social philosopher will find material already richly at hand. For while there has been developed no systematic modern philosophy of government, books and essays without number treat constantly of the wider reach of politics and law. It is noteworthy that in America the movement for a systematic development of a philosophy of law is already well begun.⁶ For the social philosopher, then, there is a clear pointing to the next important task of developing a philosophy of government.

And finally, crowning and commanding all these, must come the philosophy of highest human values,—the philosophy of the good; in short, an ethics and religion adequate to the new insights of our modern age.

Such, tentatively, is the plan of work for the social philosopher of to-day. It is not difficult to see that he enters a region not wholly unexplored, for adventurous ones, singly and in groups, have long since been mapping and occupying its wilds and fastnesses. The need of the time now, however, is for a more careful occupation and for a cultivation more systematic and entire. It is to this large task of vital organization that the social philosopher of to-day is called.

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⁶ See the General Introduction to the Modern Legal Philosophy Series. The Boston Book Company.